

# **Global Safety Standardization?**

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I've often thought about global issues - specifically global standards on safety and thought out loud most recently at the NIGDA (National Industrial Glove Distributors Association) conference in Indian Wells, California in June.

I asked Janice Bradley, Technical Director for the ISEA (Industrial Safety Equipment Association) in her session "ISEA Standards Development".....what is "the path to get an international standard passed?" - "would (and shouldn't) an ISO (International Organization For Standardization) number be attached such as ISO 6901?" (made compatible to ISO 9000 and/or 14000) "Would (and shouldn't) ISEA be our vehicle to drive the path?" Would (and shouldn't) an association like NIGDA initiate such a standard (i.e. international hand protection standard? and/or more specific, guidelines or a standard for use of latex gloves - similar to what OSHA is now working on)?"

It seems to me that to get to the end and work back (.....the ultimate mouse remember?) - in order to get the first standard passed, we must know the path, have an international need, and then a global need (i.e. AIDS and/or latex standard would be a good place to start). Maybe we start with North America (with NAFTA) - then proceed to Europe and then to include European Union (EU) - then Asia and so on.

The drivers? How about we start with overall reduced costs (to get your attention) - not counting the real and most important driver - improved global worker safety. Everyone is talking about "channel compression" and reducing those costs - one big way would be to have a global standard say on fall protection, or respiratory or hand protection, protective clothing, etc. The costs to have different respiratory products to meet US standards and Mexican standards are costs that are built into both separate products and passed on through the channel to the end user. My point? If U.S. manufacturers don't have to make different products for different markets (or countries because of different standards) they could be more competitive globally and provide better value for all end users.

Sure, I understand working conditions, economic, legal and cultural circumstances vary greatly among countries. And I understand this is not a simple task. My issue is we must start (ISEA already has) but - we must start within our segment of the safety industry - we must converge on this issue - it's inevitable -it must be done! So far we have not done our part - others have - we have not. This convergence should include of course all our channel partners - represented by their professional trade associations: ISEA, SEDA (Safety Equipment Distributors Association), SEMAA (Safety Equipment Manufacturers' Agents Association) and NIGDA - a coalition to be formed to represent our segment as we all have a stake in this.

From ISEA's point of view President Dan Shipp offers:

"As we discussed in La Costa (at the Safety Equipment Industry Annual meeting), keep in mind that ISO does have product standards, and that they've been around longer than the 9000 or 14000 series. Lot's of people don't know any other ISO standards (although they should look at their film speed).

It's important to note that the infrastructure is in place. There are ISO technical committees for protective equipment. There are US Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) for these committees. My point is this: There are ways to get involved, and even to lead, in the development of international standards. The ISEA is doing it, as are other standard-developing organizations. It takes time, people,

and money. Most of all, it takes a market demand for products that meet the international standard. Don't forget, PPE standards are the basis for regulation. If OSHA were to specify ISO standards, the market would respond.

The ISEA approach is to develop US standards that will harmonize with international requirements, or propose US standards as international standards. The national need comes first. We offer a vehicle to represent the safety equipment industry globally, and promote product standards to ISO," Shipp concludes.

Others, outside and beyond the above have been involved as "stakeholders": ANSI (American National Standards Institute) and ASSE (American Society of Safety Engineers) are already truly leaders in these endeavors on international standardization of safety equipment. Also included, in addition, many business and industry stakeholders and other standards developing organizations (i.e. ASTM, UL, AHA, NFPA, NSC, etc.); government agencies (i.e. OSHA, NIOSH, DOE, etc.); insurance companies, labor and others -but not to a large extent - our group. Why? We can - let's do it - at least be officially recognized as "converged" "stakeholders" in this inevitable global issue.

Next? - maybe we explore the actual path to a global safety standard?

Think about it.

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